



Reach Out Now!

Talk with Your Fifth Graders About Underage Alcohol Use

Meets
National
Standards

Dear Teachers,

Taking action against underage alcohol use isn't easy, but knowledge is the first step. School is a great place to open a dialogue about alcohol with students. As you know, fifth grade isn't too early to start this kind of discussion. After all, research shows that underage alcohol users number 10.8 million youth ages 12–20.¹ This publication, targeted specifically to you—the fifth-grade teacher—will help you and your students, with their parents or guardians as partners, get the conversation started. Please incorporate the information on these pages into your teaching curriculum, and remember to send the Family Resource Guide home with your students.

The benefits of classroom and at-home activities and discussions on this subject can last a lifetime and make a lifetime last.

*Charles G. Curie, SAMHSA Administrator
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

Your Students Are at a Critical Age

Sometimes young people start thinking about drinking years before they actually try it.² The earlier a child starts drinking alcohol, the more likely he or she is to develop alcohol-dependency problems.³ It may take less alcohol to damage a young brain than to damage a mature one, and the young brain may be damaged more quickly.⁴ The goal of the **REACH OUT NOW: Talk with Your Fifth Graders About Underage Alcohol Use** program is to prevent underage alcohol use.

You Can Make a Difference

As a fifth-grade teacher talking with 10- and 11-year-olds every day, you have opportunities to influence their understanding of underage alcohol use. These **Teacher Pages** focus on three key actions you, as a teacher, can take:

- Provide your students with factual information about the effects of underage alcohol use.
- Encourage your students to use critical-thinking skills to make healthy decisions and to express themselves effectively.
- Build students' confidence in their decision-making skills by providing them with opportunities to share their new knowledge with others.

Your Students' Families Can Help Meet This Challenge

Families and caregivers also have the power to prevent underage alcohol use. Research shows that parents are one of the most powerful influences on their children's behavior.⁵ Parents' disapproval of underage alcohol use has been identified as one of the key reasons youths choose *not* to drink.⁶ The **REACH OUT NOW Family Resource Guide** identifies the six actions⁷ parents and caregivers can take to help children make wise decisions about alcohol use. The six actions are:

- Establish and maintain good communication with your child.
- Get involved, and stay involved, in your child's life.
- Make clear rules and enforce them with consistency and appropriate consequences.
- Be a positive role model.
- Teach your child to choose friends wisely.
- Monitor your child's activities.

Facts for Teachers

The Good News:

Most children and youths do not drink alcohol. In fact, nearly 60 percent of youths ages 12–17 have never had a drink.⁸

Delaying Onset Is Key:

Adults who first used alcohol before age 15 are five times more likely to become dependent on alcohol than adults who first used at age 21 or older.⁹

Easy Access to Alcohol:

In a recent national survey, a little over 60 percent of eighth graders said alcohol was “fairly easy” or “very easy” to get.¹⁰ In one study, approximately 11.1 percent of 12-year-olds reported using alcohol at least once in their lifetimes. By age 13 the percentage doubles, and by age 15 it is over 50 percent.¹¹

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov

Lessons

Use these three lessons in sequence. Build on students' understanding of the negative effects of alcohol to encourage them to make and articulate healthy decisions for themselves. Then help them build communication skills to share this knowledge with others.

Lesson 1

Understanding the Effects of Alcohol

National Research Council, National Science Education Standards 5–8.6
Science in Personal and Social Perspectives—Personal Health, Risks and Benefits
Joint Committee for National School Health Education Standards Standards 1, 3, 4

Key Action: Provide your students with facts about the effects of drinking alcohol.

Curriculum Connections: Life Science, Health

What Students Will Learn: Students will understand the effects of underage alcohol use on their bodies.

Rationale: By fifth grade, most students have studied life science and the human body, and they are at a cognitive level to understand cause and effect and to think critically about information they are given. Knowledge of alcohol's effects can help them understand the importance of making healthy decisions about alcohol.

Materials Needed: Copies of **Understanding the Effects of Alcohol** Reproducible 1

Procedure: Discuss how the media portrays drinkers and the effects of drinking. Distribute the reproducible. Read aloud the description of alcohol's effects, defining unfamiliar words and correcting students' misconceptions. Students should understand that drinking alcohol can result in a loss of control and can make drinkers do things they do not want to do. They should understand that alcohol affects different people in different ways and that even one drink can have negative consequences. List any questions students have on the board and assign teams of students to research the answers in reference books.

Follow-Up: Ask students to complete the at-home activity **Alcohol: A True/False Quiz** (on the **Family Resource Guide**) with their families. Have them bring the quiz into class and review the answers together. Invite students to take the **Understanding the Effects of Alcohol** reproducible home to share with their parents and caregivers.

Lesson 2

Getting It: A Science Experiment

National Research Council, National Science Education Standards 5–8.1
Science as Inquiry
Joint Committee for National School Health Education Standards Standards 7, 9

Key Action: Help your students visualize the effects of drinking alcohol on the developing brain using a simple science experiment.

Curriculum Connections: Life Science, Health

What Students Will Learn: Students will better understand the effects of alcohol on the developing brain.

Rationale: Students have a hard time visualizing just how alcohol can affect the developing brain. Teachers can help students better understand this with the following experiment.

Materials Needed: Glass lab dishes, bottles of rubbing alcohol, eggs

Procedure: Ask students what they remember about the class discussion about the effects of alcohol. Prompt them to describe some of the effects of alcohol that they reviewed on the Lesson 1 reproducible. Have students get into groups of two or three. Give each group an egg, a lab dish, and enough rubbing alcohol to cover the egg in the dish. Ask each group to crack the egg without breaking the yolk and to place it in the dish. One student in each group should pour the rubbing alcohol over the egg until it is covered. Ask students to leave the dishes alone while you continue your conversation. After 5 minutes, ask the students to look at their eggs. What changes have taken place in the eggs' color, consistency, etc.?

Follow-Up: Have students discuss what the changes in the eggs mean and how they relate to what you've been talking about. What effect does alcohol have on the cells of our bodies and brains?



Lesson 3

Making Healthy Decisions

National Council of Teachers of English, International Reading Association Standards for the English Language Arts—5, 12
Joint Committee for National School Health Education Standards Standards 3, 5, 6
National Research Council, National Science Education Standards 5–8.6
Science in Personal and Social Perspectives—Personal Health, Risks and Benefits

Key Action: Encourage your students to use critical-thinking skills to make healthy decisions and express themselves effectively.

Curriculum Connections: Health, Life Skills, Language Arts

What Students Will Learn: Students will analyze how they make decisions, practice refusal strategies, and discuss the consequences of saying “No” to a friend.

Rationale: Students at school are surrounded by peers for hours every day. Teachers can help students cope with peer selection and peer influence.

Materials Needed: Copies of **Making Healthy Decisions** Reproducible 2

Procedure: Explain to students that this role-playing lesson will help them:

1. Identify situations in which the decisions they make can affect their health.
2. Answer the question: What is the worst thing that can happen when you say “No”?
3. Develop refusal strategies that work.

Distribute the reproducible. As you read through the page with students, share some of the steps that you follow when making a decision, such as *getting the facts, considering options, telling others your decision, and accepting their responses*. Allow students time to complete the writing assignment on the reproducible page. Then review student answers and select pairs of students to act out one of their dialogues. Discuss what might be the worst thing that can happen when you say “No.” Make sure students understand that saying “No” to a friend can have more than one outcome and that taking a stand about one's health can be more important than friendship.

Follow-Up: Have students take the reproducible home and talk with their parents or guardians about the ways in which their family makes decisions.

Understanding the Effects of Alcohol

Introduction:

You have probably seen people drinking alcohol in real life, on television, in videos, or in the movies. The alcohol might have been beer, wine, or a cocktail. It may have been served in a glass, in a bottle, or in a can. On TV, in videos, and in the movies, people drinking alcohol may seem to be happy, rich, and famous. Some may seem silly. Some may appear sad, angry, or even violent. In real life, you may have seen people act like this when they have been drinking. Or maybe not. The truth is that alcohol affects different people in different ways. But one thing is sure. Alcohol is very dangerous for a young person like you, and it is illegal, too.



Learn How Alcohol Affects the Body:¹²

- A single drink of alcohol can affect you.
- Alcohol passes through the lining of the stomach into the bloodstream. It irritates the stomach lining, which can make a person feel sick. If drinking continues, the person may vomit.
- Alcohol moves through the bloodstream to every organ in the body, including the brain.
- Once alcohol enters the brain, it can change the way a person behaves. Alcohol can make people do things they do not want to do.
- As a person drinks more alcohol, the ability to make decisions is affected. The drinker also may lose balance and be unable to see or speak clearly. The more alcohol a person drinks, the worse the effects can be.
- Alcohol can have lasting effects on the brain, impairing how a person learns, thinks, and remembers.
- Alcohol can kill. When a person drinks too much alcohol in a very short period, alcohol poisoning can occur. Breathing gets difficult. A person can vomit, pass out, or even die.
- Some people become addicted to alcohol. They drink more and more as they get used to the alcohol. But they can stop and recover.

Remember: Just one drink can have negative consequences.

Your age, weight, height, and gender will affect how you react to alcohol. For young people whose bodies are still developing, the effects of even a little alcohol can be worse than they are for older people.



Making Healthy Decisions

Activities:

1. With other students in your class, choose one of the following health-threatening situations or think of another situation that could be harmful to your health.

An older friend dares you to:

- ride a bike without a helmet
- run across a multilane highway
- hitchhike
- drink a beer



2. Write your answers to the questions below on the back of this page.

How would you decide whether to do what your friend is asking?

What would be the healthiest decision in each case?

What might happen if you said "Yes"?

What are the best and worst things that might happen if you said "No"?

3. Pick a strategy from the list of "No's" in the box to the right. Then finish this dialogue:

Friend: So, do you want to _____?
(Write in the situation you chose.)

You: No. Are you _____? My parents would lock me up.

Friend: You are such a baby. Come on. They won't find out.

You: _____

Friend: _____

You: _____

The List of "No's"

Here are some of the many ways to say "No."

Repeat: "No, I don't want to." "No, thanks." "No, I can't."

Justify: "I can't. I have to _____." (Make an excuse.)

Substitute: "No, let's _____." (Substitute another activity.)

Walk Away: "No. I have to go."

Your teacher will ask you to pair up and read your dialogue with a classmate.

Remember to make eye contact, speak clearly, and be confident.

Which way of saying "No" worked best, in your opinion? Why was it effective?